

How route options are evaluated and decisions are made

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When BPA proposes to build a power line, we evaluate how people, the environment and other factors could be impacted by the project. Before we make a final decision, we conduct a thorough environmental analysis. This review provides us the information we need to make a well-informed decision about whether, and where, to build a new line and substations.

When BPA announced its intention to explore building a 500-kilovolt line between Castle Rock, Wash., and Troutdale, Ore., the announcement created understandable public concern. To ensure we have sufficient options for the proposed line, we identified dozens of route segments that could be combined in various ways to meet the electrical need for the project. As a result, thousands of landowners were notified that they could potentially be affected by the project and are being encouraged to actively participate in the process.

BPA is taking public comment and carefully evaluating the possible routes for the line. We have already received 8,000 comments from area residents, large landowners and other interested parties and are now evaluating the various route segments in greater detail through our environmental review process. There are many issues we will evaluate, that generally fall into three broad categories:

Electrical need: The transmission system in the area is congested and close to its limits. Without a new line, we could be unable to adequately serve local needs in the very near future. First and foremost, our analysis must confirm that the project is necessary to maintain the reliability of BPA's transmission system to BPA and industry standards. We must then ensure that the proposed and, ultimately, the selected route meets those electrical needs and fulfills our contractual and statutory obligations.

Environmental impacts: For the I-5 Corridor Project, as with every transmission project, we work to minimize impacts to the natural and human environment. Among other issues, our environmental review considers:

- Social and economic impacts to private and public land
- Sensitive animal and plant species and their habitat
- Human health and safety, including electric and magnetic fields
- Aesthetics, noise levels, water quality and air quality
- Recreation, natural resources, historic and cultural sites

Further, we consider the cumulative impacts and identify ways to minimize impacts to the environment, where feasible, and identify measures that could be taken to avoid or reduce these impacts.

Economic considerations: One objective is to minimize project costs whenever possible. We consider economic impacts to landowners, businesses and others who may be affected by the construction, operation and maintenance of the line. We also consider what each proposed route will cost BPA ratepayers to construct, and the cost of mitigation. BPA will consider how well the various route alternatives meet the project purposes, the potential impacts, and what it would take to minimize and mitigate those impacts.

You will find a brief description of the National Environmental Policy Act EIS process for the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project on the following page.

To request a copy of BPA's Guide to being heard during the NEPA Process, request brochure DOE/BP-4044 on our website, www.bpa.gov.



The EIS Process

As a federal entity, BPA uses the process set forth in the National Environmental Policy Act to conduct our environmental analysis for major projects like the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project. This federal law was enacted in 1969 to ensure that high-quality environmental information is available to agency officials and the public before a decision is made.

Currently, we are conducting a thorough analysis of all the alternative I-5 project route segments. The results of this evaluation will be released to the public in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will describe the need for the project, the design of the proposed transmission line and substations, and the alternatives considered. It will also address the potential impacts to public and private land use, health and safety, visual quality, social and economic impacts, fish and wildlife, and other considerations. Our schedule for the I-5 Corridor Reinforcement Project calls for release of the draft EIS in the fall of 2011, followed by a round of public meetings and a formal 45-day comment period.

The final EIS, expected in 2013, will identify BPA's preferred route alternative, if it is not identified in the draft EIS. It will also propose mitigation measure that could avoid or reduce potential impacts. This high-quality environmental review through the EIS process will provide the basis for the agency's final decision on the I-5 Corridor project. All of the information obtained through the environmental analysis, along with the input of the stakeholders affected by the project, will be considered when the final decision is made.

